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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000357

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SUBJECT: ENGAGING WITH MALI ON NORTHERN INSECURITY

REF: A. BAMAKO 339
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 325
[1](#)C. BAMAKO 320
[1](#)D. BAMAKO 217

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Classified By: Ambassador Terence P. McCulley, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Concerned by continuing instability in the north and the absence of a clear path towards its resolution, the Ambassador called separately on President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) and Foreign Minister Moctar Ouane on April 8 and 9 to exchange views on the evolution of the situation and Mali's next planned steps. The Ambassador praised Mali's history of a peaceful approach to its restive northern populations, and he encouraged the Malian leadership to pursue a higher profile public campaign to counter Bahanga's propaganda on lack of progress with the Algiers Accords. Noting that involving northerners in efforts to secure the region was a key component of the Accords, the Ambassador suggested that, if Mali wished, the U.S. might consider how U.S. mil-mil engagement in Mali could be adjusted to incorporate the mixed special units provided for in the peace agreement. Both ATT and FM Ouane expressed irritation with the Algerians, dating from their tepid response to last fall's besieged garrison at Tinzawaten; Algeria, based on a read-out from the Algerian Ambassador in Bamako, is incensed by Mali's recourse to Libyan negotiation, and is presenting a cold shoulder in response. Notwithstanding this non-productive, if perhaps temporary, standoff from a key player, Mali still claims it plans to organize a regional summit on security within the next few weeks in Bamako, and FM Ouane is on a mission to neighboring states (to include a stop in Algiers). End Summary.

ATT on Security in the North - "I'll organize a round table"

[1](#)2. (C) In an April 8 meeting with President Toure, the Ambassador praised Mali's long-standing commitment to a peaceful approach to insecurity in the North, an area which remains unstable and worrisome even as the recent truce brokered by Libya seems to be holding. The Ambassador suggested that while Mali's people carry no affection for Bahanga or his violence, the rebel claims that the Algiers Accords are simply not advancing have gained currency, and competing Algerian and Libyan mediation risked fanning regional rivalries that were not necessarily in Mali's long-term interest. He recalled that the President's signal

speech delivered from Kayes after the attacks of May 2006 had laid out a road map for peace, unity, and tolerance and suggested that the current situation argued for a similar defining moment. This would kick off a public process outlining progress to date under the Algiers Accords and establish a timeline for implementation that would at once counter Bahanga's messages and reassure both domestic public opinion and Mali's friends in the international community.

13. (C) Regarding specific elements of the Accords, the Ambassador noted the importance of the special mixed military units composed of both loyalist Tuaregs and southerners to make northern populations feel they had a stake in securing their region. He added that if Mali found this to be useful, the U.S. might explore how our military to military cooperation and training could help make these operational. Noting that donor coordination had been advanced following the Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s by a focus group on the north, he suggested that Mali's partners would be responsive to a Malian initiative to revive such a process. On a bilateral basis, he added that the U.S. had responded to a request from the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces to create and distribute mine safety information materials in the Kidal region. (Note: via our resident MIST.)

14. (C) President Toure responded positively to the Ambassador's suggestion of a public campaign, but framed that less in terms of a persuasive speech by the head of state than as a round table debate of experts on the Algiers Accords to explain the status of their application. He added separately that he hadn't wanted to speak out personally on the Algiers Accords for fear of undermining ongoing Libyan negotiations. The President railed against Bahanga and Fagaga as threats to both national security and national unity, characterizing them as close relatives who had been joined by a few youth to defend illicit activities in a swath

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from Niger to Chad; he also accused them of participating in attacks in northern Niger.

15. (C) With regard to the Algerian role, ATT lamented that while he received encouraging signs from President Bouteflika, Algerian actions on the ground remained an enormous source of frustration, from their inaction when Mali's garrison was surrounded at Tinzawaten, to their self-interested hopes to use Bahanga against Salafists in northern Mali. Fed up with Algeria, he accepted Libya's offer of involvement during the most recent hostage crises. As for U.S. help, ATT said Mali needed assistance to train and equip Mali's military contingent based at Tessalit, and he recalled his conversation with General Ward during the AFRICOM commander's recent visit (Ref D), noting that Mali needed vehicles, combat helicopters, secure communications, training, and intelligence support. The Ambassador replied that U.S. - Mali intelligence sharing was very developed, and that the U.S. continued to work (via SOCEUR) a list of requests for non-lethal equipment that Mali had submitted in August 2007.

The FM Blames Algiers

16. (C) Ambassador repeated his points to FM Ouane April 9, emphasizing the need to maintain Mali's approach on a peaceful resolution, and urging Malian leadership to launch a public diplomacy campaign on the application of the Algiers Accords. Ouane agreed the special units were key, but expressed reservations given Fagaga's betrayal of trust in deserting his command of the special units, taking men, vehicles, and weapons. Responding to the Ambassador's point that it was important to retain Algeria as a full partner in their implementation, Ouane argued with somewhat tortured logic that the recent Tripoli Entente were not "new negotiations," and represented the intervention of Khadafi

Foundation rather than the Libyan Government (sic). He too said Mali had only accepted Libya's offer of mediation out of frustration with repeated disappointment by Algeria. Ouane complained that Algeria wanted to have it both ways; they had not helped, but now seemed to be annoyed that another nation had stepped forward.

Algerians Miffed (but not out of the game)

17. (C) And, indeed, the Algerians are quite annoyed. In an April 9 meeting with the Ambassador to discuss the north, Algerian Ambassador Karim Abul Gheraieb said he had received explicit instructions from President Bouteflika to stand down from any mediation between Mali and the Tuareg rebels/bandits, and to refrain from any "facilitation" of the Algiers Accords. Reading from his dispatch to Algiers, he described his tart reply to Malian FM Ouane on being informed after the fact of Mali's decision to permit Libyan mediation in the Bahanga hostage crisis "outside the context of the Algiers Accords," and in effect "being treated as a sub-contractor to another mediator."

18. (C) The Algerians apparently take particular exception to a series of articles in a Malian newspaper they believe to be Libyan financed (and reportedly directed by a close associate of ATT), which criticized Algeria's actions in northern Mali, characterized Bahanga and Fagaga as "agents of Algiers," and accused Algerian security officials of involvement in drug trafficking. (Note: Both ATT and other senior Malian officials have repeatedly made the same claims.) The Algerian ambassador admitted that they would re-engage after an unspecified "cooling off period." Virtually this same series of complaints and suggestion of eventual renewed engagement were featured in an April 10 report on Radio France International.

Comment: Need for Leadership and Risk-Taking

19. (C) As the Ambassador observed to both ATT and FM Ouane, the paths of peaceful engagement and faith in Tuareg participation in security arrangements in the North require taking risks (something the consensus-devoted ATT is averse to doing). Such courageous moves are vital, however, as Bahanga's continued rebellion is creating a climate of

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insecurity that others, be they AQIM or opportunistic Tuaregs unrelated to Bahanga, could exploit. According to FM Ouane, plans will continue for a regional summit on security despite Algeria's tiff with its Malian and Libyan neighbors, and he is now travelling in the region to tender formal invitations from ATT to his counterparts. The Algerian Ambassador acknowledged that the current state of the affairs was not an obstacle to planning the regional security conference - which we took to mean the event is too far from reality to bother blocking planning. Meanwhile, with the truce holding and major mediator Algeria in standoff mode, we will continue to encourage the Malians to seize the public debate to counter Bahanga's corrosive influence on northern Mali's confidence and security.
MCCULLEY